

Evaluation practices assessing the impacts of initiatives targeting 25+ NEETs

COUNTRY REPORT – MALTA

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IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE PROJECT 'LOST
MILLENNIALS – TRANSNATIONAL RESEARCH
NETWORK FOR THE EVALUATION OF INITIATIVES
TARGETING 25+ NEETS'

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Project summary:

The project 'Lost Millennials' focuses on a regularly neglected group of the generation of Millennials: young people aged 25-29 neither in employment or education and training (25+ NEETs). This generation started their working life shortly after the economic crisis of 2008, perceiving uncertainty and lack of security for work and well-being, they are more likely to be inactive or in precarious jobs. The main objective of the project is to contribute to the successful integration of 25+ NEETs to the labour market through increasing knowledge on the effects of employment initiatives on 25+ NEETs, building capacity of stakeholders to perform impact studies and thus improving the quality of labour market interventions. This objective will be achieved through the creation of the transnational research network which will share know-how and good practices, the evaluations of governmental and community-based initiatives targeting 25+ NEETs, as well as the engagement of stakeholders to increase the policy-relevance of project results.

For more information, please visit our [website](#), contact us on lm.leadpartner@hetfa.hu and follow our social media ([Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#)).

The Lost Millennials project is funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway through the EEA and Norway Grants Fund for Youth Employment.

Implemented by:



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1. Introduction

Our previous research¹ identified 18 initiatives and programmes which — at least potentially — target(ed) 25+ NEETs in Malta since 2007. Of 18 initiatives and programmes, 15 were co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF). In the 2007-13 and 2014-2020 programming periods, Malta implemented all its ESF co-financed human resource development interventions under the Operational Programme (OP) II. The initiatives and programmes were not evaluated individually, but (as it is an obligation of the member states) the implementation of the entire OPs and the achievements under the different Priority Axis within the OP were monitored, evaluated and reported in the Annual Implementation Reports. Besides that, the Erasmus+ 2014-2020 Programme's implementation in Malta - which may significantly impact 25+ NEETs - was also subject to a mid-term evaluation.

We identified relatively few documented evaluations (4) which assess the impacts of initiatives (or larger scale programmes including relevant projects) on 25+ NEETs in Malta. The main methodology applied was desk research of publicly available data and documents complemented by expert feed-backs (from public bodies responsible for managing ESF and ERASMUS+ funded programmes).

2. General information of evaluation practices

The *Strategic Report on Cohesion Policy (2007-2013)*² provides a general description of the evaluations planned for the programming period and mentions four elements relevant to our topic: (1) mid-term evaluation of OP I and OP II (with a summary of general findings), (2) cohort study survey, (3) thematic evaluation of OP I and OP II, and (4) the upcoming ex-ante evaluation of the following programming period's OPs (2014-2020).

The *Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy (2014-2020)*³ defines the roles and responsibilities of the Evaluation Steering Group and describes the evaluations to be carried out during the programming period concerned.

Within our research, we have identified the following accessible evaluations relevant for assessing the impact of initiatives targeting 25+ NEETs in Malta:

¹ Employment initiatives supporting 25+ NEETs in Malta

² The Government of Malta (2012 a), pp 50-56

³ The Government of Malta (2016 a)

1. *Cohort Study on the Operational Programme II. 2007-13: Empowering People for More Jobs and a Better Quality of Life - ESF.*⁴ During our mapping activities, we identified nine initiatives or programmes within this Operational Programme (OP), which (potentially) addressed 25+ NEETs. The initiatives or programmes were not evaluated individually. The National Statistical Office (NSO) conducted longitudinal Cohort Studies in six waves between 2011 and 2014⁵ to evaluate the impact of ESF-funded programmes on the beneficiaries (the change in their labour market status). The Managing Authority (MA) extracted participants' data from the SFD 2007-2013⁶ and provided them to the NSO. The target population for the survey consisted of all persons who had completed training co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) up to one year before the survey.⁷ The different waves of the survey were conducted between 2011-2015.
2. *Assessment of the contribution of OPII (2007-13) initiatives to education and lifelong learning and the enhancement of the employability and adaptability of the workforce.* In addition to the Cohort Study by NSO, PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC) conducted a thematic evaluation of the OP II (2007-13).⁸ PWC conducted the assessment between 2013-2014.
3. *Ex-ante Evaluation of Malta's OP II Investing in Human Capital to Create More Opportunities and Promote the Wellbeing of Society 2014-2020.*⁹ During our mapping activities, we identified six initiatives or programmes within this Operational Programme (OP) which (potentially) addressed 25+ NEETs. The initiatives or programmes were not evaluated individually. The ex-ante evaluation of the OP was conducted between 2013-2014.
4. *Mid-term Evaluation on Erasmus+ 2014-2020 implementation in Malta.*¹⁰ Since Erasmus+ might address 25+ NEETs as one of its main goals is reducing youth unemployment, we included its available mid-term evaluation which was conducted in 2017.

⁴ On wave 1: The Government of Malta (2012b) pp 79-82; on waves 2 and 3: The Government of Malta (2013) pp 50-53; waves 4 to 6: The Government of Malta (2014a) pp 53-58.

⁵ The Final Implementation Report of the OP mentions 9 waves (3 more conducted in 2015), but no further information on the findings of the last 3 waves is available in the Monitoring Committee's Annual Reports. The Government of Malta (2014b) slide 88.

⁶ Structural Funds Database 2007-2013

⁷ On the methodology: NSO (2012)

⁸ The Government of Malta (2014a) pp. 58-59; and The Government of Malta (2014c)

⁹ The Government of Malta (2013) pp 53-54; and The Government of Malta (2014) pp 60-61; and The Government of Malta (2016b) pp 91.

¹⁰ Grant Thornton Services (2017)

In three cases out of four, we had access to secondary sources - OP II's annual implementation reports, summarising the findings of different evaluations. In the case of the mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ 2014-2020 implementation in Malta, we could analyse the original and entire document.

3. Characteristics of evaluation practices

One out of the four evaluations was an ex-ante evaluation, and the other three were mid-term evaluations. External evaluators conducted all of them. Based on the *Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy 2014-2020*,¹¹ between 2020 and 2023, all OP objectives will be subject to ex-post evaluations, but these documents are not prepared or available yet. The cohort study applied only quantitative methods, the ex-ante evaluation applied only qualitative methods (desk research and document analysis), while the other two evaluations applied mixed methods: qualitative and quantitative.

The *Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy 2014-2020*¹² describes the main characteristics of the evaluations to be conducted (i.e., independent, intentional, impartial, robust, timely and evidence-based) and the evaluation criteria to be used (i.e., relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and impact). A particular focus of evaluations between 2020 and 2023 (among others) will be on "access to employment and adaptability of the workforce".

3.1 Methodology of evaluation practices

The cohort study applied purely quantitative methods, namely statistical analysis. The total number of persons eligible to participate in the survey (waves one to six) was 38,054. We have the number of respondents available on wave one: 6,197 persons were eligible, 702 persons were in the gross sample, and 310 persons were contacted. Concerning the sample size, it means 11% for the gross sample.

The Thematic evaluation of OP II (2007-2013) applied the following methods: case study, desk research, documentation analysis and survey with employers. The latest targeted all employers (427 persons) whose employees benefited from the Training Aid Framework. One hundred seventy-two responded to the survey questionnaire with a 40% response rate.

The ex-ante evaluation of OP II (2014-2020) applied only qualitative methods, namely document analysis and desk research.

¹¹ The Government of Malta (2016 a)

¹² The Government of Malta (2016 a)

The mid-term evaluation of ERASMUS+ 2014-2020 implementation in Malta applied mixed methods: statistical analysis, a questionnaire-based survey on institutions and learners, interviews and desk research. Just under 10% (438) of learners responded to the survey.

3.2 Types of evaluations and their results

All four evaluations identified within our research were conducted by external evaluators. In all cases, the evaluated programmes were found successful or somewhat successful.

The cohort study did not contain concrete recommendations.

In the case of the thematic evaluation of OP II (2007-2013), recommendations addressed (1) education and lifelong learning, (2) employability and adaptability of the workforce, (3) environmental sustainability and equal opportunities, and (4) ESF principles. Recommendations described the potential/necessary actions missing from the OP or which should be included in the next version of the OP to achieve stated goals. General recommendations also addressed the implementation and management of the OP.

The ex-ante evaluators of OP II (2014-2020) developed the following concrete recommendations:

- Adding further information for any initiatives aimed at mainstreaming equal opportunities.
- Including a section articulating the efforts and initiatives for sustainable development in the preparation, implementation and monitoring phases.
- Some of the indicators were more relevant, measurable and coherent with the actions.
- Including further details to allow a proper appraisal of human resource adequacy.
- MA adopting an appropriate mechanism to alleviate the administrative burden on beneficiaries.

The evaluators of the ERASMUS+ 2014-2020 in Malta also suggested concrete measures, namely: (1) to increase cross-sectoral projects, (2) to introduce a simpler application for first-timers and (3) to amend the current guidebook.

4. Conclusions

This report discussing the evaluation practices assessing the impacts of initiatives and programmes targeting 25+ NEETs in Malta is a relatively brief country report. During our research and consultation with officials in the relevant ministry dealing with the management of European Funds, we found that no evaluation specifically assessed the impact of interventions on 25+ NEETs in Malta. The most significant limitation of our research was the availability and accessibility of primary data, namely the original evaluation documents. We could mostly rely on secondary data: reports mentioning the findings and conclusions of evaluations.

Operative Programmes (OPs) funded by the Structural Funds are subject to evaluations (ex-ante, mid-term and ex-post) as the member states are obliged. The evaluations on the ESF-funded OP II in both programming periods (2007-2013 and 2014-2020) present a general assessment of the interventions' (potential) impact on the labour market, on employability and adaptability of the workforce. These assessments are not limited to or specific about the impact on 25+ NEETs since 25+ NEETs did not appear as a target group of initiatives and programmes until very recently.¹³

However, we believe that the four evaluations identified during our research provide essential information and facts for further strategic planning activities that concern interventions reaching out to unemployed people, vulnerable social groups, youth, and potentially 25+ NEETs.

¹³ We could identify two running projects in Malta targeting 25+ NEETs, both started in 2021, SMARTLY and INTERCEPT, both implemented by Jobsplus.

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Email consultation with relevant bureaucrats in the *Ministry for the Economy, European Funds and Lands*